

never knew I could feel that much

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/31383824) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/31383824>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Shadow and Bone (TV)
Relationship:	The Darkling . Aleksander Morozova/Alina Starkov
Characters:	Alina Starkov , The Darkling . Aleksander Morozova , Genya Safin , Baghra (The Grisha Trilogy) , Background & Cameo Characters
Additional Tags:	a lot of emotions but also , Smut , Porn With Plot , Manipulative Relationship , Angst , Rough Kissing , Explicit Sexual Content , accidental orgasm denial , Age Difference , Power Imbalance , Darklina - Freeform
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-19 Completed: 2021-05-20 Words: 11,302 Chapters: 3/3

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by [lemonsofjune](#)

Summary

Alina hates General Kirigan almost from the moment she sets eyes on him. Everything goes downhill from there.

Or, Alina and Aleksander's relationship moves a lot faster than canon.

Notes

This fic is complete at three chapters. I'm doing one last revision pass on everything before posting, and the second and third chapters will be posted within the next 24 hours or so.

Also, I have only ever seen the show and have not read the books, if it's not exceedingly obvious from the contents of this fic.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

What are you?

Alina Starkov hates General Kirigan from the moment that he commands that she be taken to the Little Palace and away from Mal and everything she has ever known.

She still hates him after he saves her life and spirits her away from the drüskelle, and as he rides with her toward the Little Palace and all the safety it is supposed to afford her.

She hates him even as he tells her *you are not alone* and steps close to her, so close she can see every line on his face and the smudge of blood on his collar and oh, Saints, *smell* him. Here she is, a day and half since her last five-minute cold shower at the camp, smelling like blood and sweat and horse, standing almost chest to chest with the general of the Second Army.

And fuck, she hates him even as she realizes, quite suddenly and definitely against her will, that she wouldn't mind kissing him.

It is infinitely easier to get back on the horse with him after that. He settles behind her in the saddle, reaches around her to grip the reins in his hands. He asks if she's secure and she nods her yes partly because she does not trust her voice at that moment and partly because she is too busy thinking about how his chest is leaning against her back to coherently form words.

She hates him as he leaves her with the guards at the Little Palace (even as she wants to kiss him, or maybe even more than that), hates him even as she is shown into what must be the most opulent suite in the entire Palace.

She hates that she is alone, completely and totally, in a way that she hasn't been since she and Mal were separated for six months when they joined the Army on their different tracks. Except even then she knew where Mal was, and he her, with the promise of being ultimately reunited after everything was said and done.

And now, even as she strips and slides into the softest bed of her life, she doesn't know when she will see Mal next. She nominally knows where he is for now, but the longer she spends at the Little Palace the less sure she can be of anything regarding where or how he is.

Alina falls asleep missing Mal and hating General Kirigan, and hating herself just a little bit for not being able to think about Mal without thinking about Kirigan, too. She falls asleep missing Mal, yes, but also thinking about how in the meantime she wouldn't mind kissing -- or, she might as well be honest with herself at this point -- fucking the general.

###

She almost -- *almost* -- forgets how much she hates General Kirigan the next morning when she meets Genya. Genya is the first person she's met since waking up on that damn skiff that treats her like an actual human being, even as she helps Alina get ready to meet the king.

She wants to swallow her tongue, though, when the general reappears when she's talking to Genya and planning her escape. He walks by her side as they enter the courtyard between the wings of the palaces and she isn't sure if she spends more time staring at the palace grounds or at him.

He is absolutely beautiful.

She tries to hide her nerves behind some light flirting and he responds back, tit for tat, and damn if that doesn't make her want to jump him even more.

Even in the throne room she can't hardly keep her eyes off of him. In this moment he is her rock, and she relies on his cues and subtle nods to get her through the introductions. He had walked her through the steps of the introduction as they'd crossed the courtyards earlier, though the Queen's question so thoroughly breaks her concentration that she's left glancing around the room looking for an answer.

Then what are you?

She knows what Kirigan intends to do when he lifts his hands to begin the demonstration and pulls the room into darkness. She watches him in the waning light, the focus that settles on his face as he calls on the shadows that will engulf them. There's a flicker in his eyes, even as they're now the only thing she can see, and she realizes that he is *savoring* this chance to show off.

He turns to her and gives her a slight nod, and she knows it's her turn, now. He leans forward and whispers in her ear, and his words send a shiver down her spine and even further. She glances away -- looks toward the king, remembers the powers she's supposed to be showcasing here -- but it's not until he grabs her wrist and squeezes that she lights up the room.

She wonders, briefly, if where they touch will burn him. She doesn't yet know or understand the full extent of her powers, and in spite of everything she doesn't want to hurt him. But ironically enough, as she glows bright enough to illuminate the entire throne room, she can feel where each of his fingers grasps her wrist as if his touch was the one that burned.

Her wrist is cold the instant he releases it, as if the lack of his body heat turns her skin to ice. She hears the king speaking to General Kirigan but his words sound distant, like an echo of a memory instead of something happening right in front of her. Instead she's looking at Kirigan, glancing down at her hand -- and what powers does she hold, what powers can *he* unlock inside of *her* with but a simple touch -- and back up at him, in complete awe at him, at herself, at the power of the two of them together.

She is in awe of this power, and still she wants more.

The king and the general come to an agreement on her training as she stands there completely still, fully aware that her part in this is over. She bows when she must, and when the general reaches out to take her hand she must remind herself that they are still in public and that his doing so is nothing more than a sign of unity, of agreement, of power.

You were perfect.

Alina takes the general's words and tucks them deep inside her to consider at a later time, even as she is positively bursting with excitement. At the same time she is totally and completely entranced by him: his proximity, his touch, how every word he says to her makes her hate him a little less and leaves her breathless every time.

Welcome home, Miss Starkov.

###

Alina is welcomed into the ranks of the Grisha (more or less, but honestly *fuck* Zoya). Marie and Nadia more than make up for Zoya's vitriol, and that sucker punch on the training grounds is so, so satisfying.

Weeks pass like that, training in the morning and then filling her afternoon working with Baghra and then reading in the library, writing to Mal, and talking to Marie and Nadia, or Genya when she gets a chance. The only time she sees the general is when she catches glimpses of him down halls and up staircases, but she's happy to keep her distance from him. The less time she spends near him, the less she has to think about how she *feels* when she's around him. She hates him still, at least a little, but a lot of that hatred from the first day has been replaced by a warmth between her legs that she would rather not address except for by candlelight and in the middle of her enormous bed.

She will never allow the Little Palace feel like home, but she's finally starting to settle in. Then Genya wakes her one morning with riding clothes in hand and tells her she's going to spend the morning with the general instead of training and oh, how that is the very last thing she wanted right now.

The black kefta lays on the bed like an offering, one that there's no way she could misinterpret. She had thought, maybe, that the light flirting between them had been just fun between two overly stressed individuals. But as she stares at the stunning contrast of the gold embroidery against black, she knows that this is him, asking.

She's not quite ready to answer, yet.

Outside in her blue kefta, she knows that it's the first thing he sees when he turns away from his horse.

"Did you not like the color I chose for you?" He asks.

“You’re the only one who wears it,” she replies, with a cool nonchalance that she hopes conveys that she is not his. Not yet.

The look on his face when he asks her to call him Aleksander is the most vulnerable he’s been with her. As she studies his face, Alina doesn’t know what to think of him anymore -- except that she’d prefer not to think about him at all. But given that they’re going riding together this morning, that’s not really an option.

Now she *really* wants to fuck him.

They ride further away from the Little Palance than she thought they might, though still within an easy ride back. The general -- Aleksander, because now that she knows his given name she will not be able to think of him as anything else -- leads them through a well-worn path in the woods and stops in front of an overgrown fountain. He’s first off his horse, and he watches Alina dismount hers with a hungry gaze.

She ought to know, because his expression matches her own.

Alina has never been one to shy away from what she wants. She had wanted a friend in the orphanage as a child, and had found one in Mal with his kind words and quick fists. She had wanted to join the army but without having to fight, and had diligently studied mapmaking for years before her enlistment. She had wanted an attractive blond mapmaker during her training, and then spent almost as much time flirting as she did studying. They slept together during their first weekend of leave, three days before he died in the Fold.

So Alina contemplates her own desires as she follows Aleksander to the fountain, and takes the coin into her hand when he gives it to her. She watches as he kisses his and flicks it into the water.

What had he wished for?

She follows the coin with her eyes as it settles down into the murky depths of the water, then holds her gaze on her own reflection. She already looks so different than she did just a month ago: rounder cheeks and cleaner hair, but also the hard look she gets in her eyes when she’s chasing after something she wants. She is relishing in the growth of her own strength and power as it grows, day by day. She doesn’t know who she’s becoming, but she isn’t sure she misses who she used to be.

“What do you see?” Aleksander asks, pulling her away from her pensive introspection.

“A new version of me,” Alina says carefully.

“Perhaps the real you has finally emerged.” Aleksander’s smirk is her undoing. She looks down in lieu of a response, unwilling to trust that her mouth will behave. She doesn’t mean to play coy, but it’s the safest option in front of her at the moment.

Aleksander steps around her, dangerously close, but he reaches past to clear off the branches that are obscuring the fountain. He mercifully changes the subject, and she takes the opportunity to walk away from the fountain before she can do something she regrets.

Alina sits as he cleans and they talk of life at the Little Palace, and she tries and fails to keep the conversation light.

“I’m just not sure I understand where this road leads,” she says, far more honest than she means to be. But talking to Aleksander has lulled her into a false sense of security, one that has loosened her lips.

Aleksander is leaning back against the fountain now, studying her. But then he, in turn, is far more honest with her than she would have expected, telling her that he knows how she feels.

Because of course he understands how out of place she feels. *Of course* he is intimately familiar with feeling so lonesome you wish you were anyone else. Of course.

He glances at her and she looks away again, and as uneager she is to discuss this she changes the subject to something less painful, at least for her, to talk about. The story of the Black Heretic was one she grew up with, since he was the cause of the Fold that took her parents and those of so many others that were in the orphanage with her. She had noticed it on the fountain as soon as they arrived and she felt the need to demonstrate her knowledge of history, to show Aleksander that she wasn’t just some dumb mapmaker who may or may not be incredibly attracted to him.

She knows she’s being cheeky, at the end of the story, but talking about the origins of the Fold is always fucking depressing, in her opinion. Of course, with Aleksander the story is more personal than for anyone else, so her attempt at humor is met with a morose response. She matches him in tone because it’s a lot, to be reminded that the hopes and dreams of an entire country rest on your shoulders.

And not just the hopes and dreams of a country, but also those of the incredibly hot general that she really, really wants to do dirty things to with her mouth.

“That’s why you look at me like that, isn’t it? I’m your solution.”

Maybe she’s been misreading this all along. Maybe he hasn’t been flirtatious, but just friendly. Maybe he’s not hungry, but hopeful. Maybe she’s been building up her crush these last few weeks because she’s starved for human connection and under the stress to harness her powers so that she can destroy the Fold, and she’s reaching out desperately to forge any kind of relationship she can get.

“Only if I fail, they’ll turn on me. And I’ll be the brand new Heretic.”

She turns back to the fountain, not willing to meet his gaze again. She could throw up right here and now, the way the nerves are churning her stomach and her tongue has gone dry. She’s completely misinterpreted everything between them, and made a total fool of herself.

But then Aleksander steps up behind her, and places one hand on her shoulder and the other on the fountain. He’s close to her like this, his chest up against her back, and her breath catches at the contact.

“If you believe anything,” he says in her ear, “believe I will not let that happen.”

She looks over her shoulder at him and then turns around so that she's facing him with her back to the fountain, her hands resting on the cold white stone behind her. He trails his fingers across her upper back as she moves so that his hand is now on her other shoulder and she's loosely caged in by his arms.

"I appreciate the sentiment, but..." she says, looking at the horses and not quite sure where she's going with this.

"I shall be right by your side," he says, filling in the rest of her sentence. "You and I are going to change the world, Alina."

She looks up at him then, and realizes how close they are to one another. She could easily pull away from his grip, step down from the fountain or further along it. But that is so far from what she wants right now that it doesn't even occur to her to do so.

Instead she meets his eyes and stretches upward onto the tips of her toes, tilting her chin upward and closing her eyes. Aleksander inclines his head, and their lips meet in the middle.

It's a chaste first kiss, soft and tentative like neither of them are quite sure that this is really happening.

The second kiss is powerful, Aleksander surging forward and Alina leaning back to accommodate, though not so far as to cede much ground. She bites his lip and sucks on it, pulling on it long enough for him to let out a low moan. She puts one hand tentatively on his waist, and Aleksander in turn slides his hand down her shoulder to her elbow.

They come together a third time, a fourth, a fifth, each kiss a fight for control. Alina reaches her other hand up to his jaw and rests it on his beard for a moment, then slides it into his hair so she can draw him closer every time he pulls away. He nips at her lip and she gasps in surprise, and he takes the opportunity to push his tongue between her lips. They're kissing deeper now, their tongues taking turns exploring the shape of each other's mouths.

Aleksander pulls back and kisses the corner of her mouth, her cheek, her chin, then down her neck as far as her kefta will allow. Alina groans as he works his way back up, and he steps forward to pin her up against the fountain.

He is hard for her, and she can feel it where he's pressed into her thigh. She slides her hand down his waist and across the bottom of his jacket and cups him in her hand, squeezing just a tad. He moans, louder this time, and behind them one of the horses whinnies, startled.

Their hands fly off one another, and Aleksander laughs into her shoulder.

"I should get you back," he says. But then he cups his face in his hand and kisses her again, soft and sweet as the first. "Baghra does hate tardiness."

Alina laughs, even as he pulls away to go to his horse. She turns back to the fountain, knowing he won't leave without her, and pulls the coin he gave her earlier out of her pocket. She closes her eyes, makes her wish, and then flicks it into the fountain. She turns around

before it hits the water, because she doesn't have to watch it to know that her wish is going to come true.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Training with Baghra is hit and miss, a little more literally than she'd like. She's progressing, but never fast enough.

Who are you holding back for, then?

She thinks of Mal every time she trains, because every time she summons the sun feels like a betrayal of everything they worked so hard for together. She wishes she could forget him, wishes she could let go, but she can't. Not yet.

Baghra's harsh words keep her up at night, though. After a week of restless nights she gets up and pulls on her velvet robe, intent to wander the halls just long enough to stretch her legs, or maybe until she finds the kitchens. That she ends up wandering in a very specific direction is a total coincidence. Honestly.

When she sees Aleksander's door ajar, she doesn't intend to do more than glance inside and see if he's awake. But no matter how quiet she is, he senses she's there and calls her name.

"Am I disturbing you?" Her voice is hoarse from disuse, and she clears her throat lightly.

"Not at all. Can't sleep?"

She shakes her head and enters at his request. Alina has always felt particularly vulnerable at night, in the quiet and the dark, and tonight is no exception. She hadn't particularly been in the mood for company, but his soft words and quiet demeanor are welcoming. He offers her a drink and she takes it, sipping the chilled orange liqueur that goes down smoothly.

She's drawn to his side and stands closer to him than she would have before they kissed at the fountain. Looking for something to take her mind off the last time they were this close together, she asks about the map.

Aleksander sounds stressed as he explains their predicament. Alina feels somewhat responsible, though it doesn't feel like he was trying to blame her: rather, he is laying out the facts as they are, bitterly and then angry. But not at her, never at her, and despite his anger she never feels unsafe.

It is clear that Aleksander has led a hard life. He speaks of dead friends with a wobble in his voice, and even as that fades and makes way for anger again she moves to his side, desperate to comfort and console him. She touches his wrist, first, and with no effort at all illuminates the entire room.

Alina hadn't noticed the creeping shadows as he talked, as they wormed their way up the walls and smothered the lights. She'd had eyes only for him, him and his pain, and only

wanted to alleviate that which made him hurt so much. She hadn't consciously reached for her power, hadn't meant to bathe the room in brilliant sunlight, but as the shadows fade back into the corners they belonged in she realizes what she's done.

She looks him in the eyes and tells him, "You are not alone," the same words that he had told her when she needed to hear them most.

Aleksander looks at Alina like he is truly seeing her for the first time with his red-rimmed eyes. He reaches up and his fingertips graze her temple, and then slide back into her hair and pull her closer. His touch is rougher than she'd expected but she moves with it and then some, closing the gap between them until they are chest to chest. He pulls her the rest of the way, guides her with the hand on the back of her head until her lips meet his and they're kissing again.

They're kissing again. Kissing Aleksander is easier at night, when there's no obligations and nowhere else she ought to be. Maybe it's because nighttime is his domain, when the shadows he commands are long in the dying lantern light. Maybe it's because it's at night they can be themselves without all the trappings that come with daytime: he is a general and she is the sun summoner, but right now they can just be two lonely people who want each other. Who need each other.

And Alina needs him right now, like this. Her hands go wandering, her right up to the back of his head, the left to his hip. She pulls him into her and deepens the kiss, pushing forward to meet him every time he pulls back.

He reaches out with his free hand and finds her shoulder, then slides it down her chest. The cut of her nightgown means his hand skims over her bare clavicle, and he pauses there just long enough to run his thumb over the bone before continuing down to her breast.

She gasps as he cups it, squeezes it, rubs his thumb over the nipple as it rises through the thin material of her dress. It's chilly in the Little Palace tonight, so it doesn't take much.

This time Alina's the one to pull away from the kiss, just enough to shift to the corner of Aleksander's mouth. She leaves a trail of kisses in her wake, over his rough beard and down his jawline and his long, gorgeous neck. She can feel his head stretching back in pure bliss as he lets out a moan, and she continues down.

She takes her hand away from his hair to pull aside his robe. It comes apart easily, baring his chest. Her hand moves to his chest subconsciously and *Saints*, his kefta does him no favors at all. She knew he was fit, but never could have imagined this much muscle on such a narrow frame.

She kisses just down to his collarbone, where she stops to suck. He moans again, and then pinches her nipple between her thumb and forefinger, eliciting a matching moan from her.

When she finally releases his collarbone, leaving a mark just red enough to last the night, he catches her face in his hand and guides it up to his, kissing her softly once again. He steps forward and she has to step back to retain her balance. He steps again and she does too, and

they do this little dance until they're a quarter of the way around the table. He steps once more but this time to the side, so that she is forced to back into the table.

Alina knows what he's doing and she's one step ahead of him: she braces herself against the edge and hops onto it, and deepens the kiss now that they're of a height.

The hand that he's had on her breast is now at her shoulder, pulling first at her robe and then at her nightgown. The nightgown is deeply cut and loose-fitting, and slides off her shoulder with the same ease as her robe. Alina lets out a happy sigh and pulls her arm the rest of the way out of the sleeve, and then goes ahead and pulls her other arm out, too.

Alina Starkov sits on the map table at the center of the Little Palace's war room, naked to the waist and kissing the general. He pulls away from her for just a moment, and looks at her the way a thirsty man looks at a fresh spring. She puts her hands on the table behind her and leans back, pushing her chest forward, waiting to see what he will do next.

"I have been waiting a long time for you, for this," he says, awe heavy in his words. Then he steps forward and takes her breast in his hand and her nipple in his mouth and bites, ever so gently. Alina closes her eyes and lets the feeling overwhelm her from top to bottom. She lets out a soft gasp, almost a whimper, and at the same time her legs squirm to try and quell the feeling that's rising from her down there as well.

Nothing escapes Aleksander's notice, not even while he's busy with a breast in his mouth. As he is busy alternating between licking and sucking on her nipple, his other hand makes its way down her stomach. Over the material that's pooled at her waist, he takes two fingers and reaches gently between her legs and presses hard, hard enough to make her buck her hips up in response.

"*Fuck*," Alina mutters, breathless. She will happily fuck him right here, right now, manners be damned, if they stay on their present course.

"Not yet," Aleksander mutters, pulling away from her. He must have a similar thought, because he looks about ready to have her right here and now. His chest is heaving and his thin pajama pants are straining to contain him.

"I should go," Alina says, too quickly, and she could kick herself for even thinking it, yet alone speaking it aloud. But then Aleksander nods in agreement, and she knows that she is unfortunately right.

She searches in the puddle of fabric at her waist for the sleeve to her nightgown, and Aleksander helps guide her arm through the fabric. The second sleeve is trickier but with his help the shoulder settles right back into place. The whole time he is so careful, almost reverent, touching her only when necessary and not meeting her eyes at all.

While she is still on the table, though, he leans forward one last time and kisses her. It is a long, slow kiss of goodbye, and she nips his lip as a reminder that there is still more to come.

Once she is back on her own two feet, she turns one more time to face Aleksander, such a glutton for things she can't yet have. He takes her face in both hands and kisses her forehead.

“Goodnight, Alina.” He is breathless, still, as if he can’t quite believe her presence.

She can believe it, even if it’s something she never would have dreamed of wanting.

“Goodnight, Aleksander,” she says, and she has to leave before she can start kissing him again. She closes the door behind her and pauses in the doorway for just a minute. She thinks she hears him approach from the other side, as if to stop her, but the door doesn’t move.

She leaves, back to the bed where she knows she will find no sleep tonight.

###

As the days pass, Alina writes and writes and writes, but she never receives so much as a word from Mal. She can only let her heart be broken so many times before it’s past repairing.

Mal has always been wary of Grisha, and especially Grisha women. A younger Alina had thought he was scared of Grisha, and now Alina wonders if it was because he was too proud and didn’t like the idea of not being able to take one in a fight.

She had hoped, when she first left for the Little Palace, that this wasn’t something that would come between them. But as the weeks turn into months without a single word from him, she thinks that maybe their friendship didn’t mean as much to him as she had thought. Grimly, she comes to accept what she’s going to have to do.

Baghra’s words only cement her idea, this terrible idea, but she is stronger when she lets go of her guilt and embraces her power. She has spent so much of her life unempowered, armed only with her voice and whatever physical weapons lay around her, that having this kind of power come to her fingertips when summoned is so, so satisfying.

She summons Genya one night, knowing that this will be easier if she doesn’t have to go on about her day afterwards. Genya does as she asks without a word, as if she understands the solemnity of the moment. With a stroke of her fingers, the scar on Alina’s hand disappears forever.

Alina is sure: sure that this is the right thing, sure that this needs to be done, sure that she has to let go of Mal and everything she had before she was the sun summoner in order to embrace her power and place at the Little Palace. She glances up at the black kefta that’s hung on the door of her wardrobe ever since she refused to go riding in it.

That, too, she is sure of now.

###

The winter fete is all anyone can talk about. When the day arrives, Marie and Nadia come up to Alina’s room to keep her company and attempt to do her hair. Marie has been dancing around a poor squaller for days before he finally gathers up the guts to ask her to accompany him to the fete, to disastrous results. It wasn’t like she could really have a date, anyways, but it’s not like the poor guy knew that.

Genya is a breath of fresh air when she arrives to do Alina's hair and makeup, even as she reminds Marie of her appointment and Nadia leaves to accompany her to it.

"I know the general insisted on black for the performance, but perhaps after, you could return to blue," Genya says offhandedly.

Alina has thought about this, long and hard, since the night she had Genya erase the scar on her hand. The last time he offered her a black kefta, she'd wanted to make a statement in her refusal. But that had been a quiet statement of identity, of independence, something she wanted to make clear to him, first and foremost.

She understands the point of them presenting a united front at the winter fete, too. The question is whether she'll keep the kefta after the feast and the fun, or if she'll return to the blue that she's learned to embrace over these last few months.

A lot has changed since he first offered her the black kefta, though. Their relationship, first and foremost, whatever it was by now and whatever it may grow into. But Alina, too, has changed, both in power and strength of character, and in who she wants to be. She had been so worried about finding a place of belonging among other Grisha that she had forgotten one key fact: she would never be like them. She is the only Sun Summoner alive, and the only equal she will ever have is the Aleksander. They are two sides of the same coin, darkness and daylight, and by choosing to wear the black kefta even after the fete she will be accepting and embracing that.

"I think I'm going to stick with the black, moving forward," Alina replies, satisfied with her decision.

Genya's response to this statement, though, is completely baffling.

I want you to be careful of powerful men.

Alina knows that Genya is in an awful position in the palace, from the bits she's dropped in conversation here and there. Alina has never been under the illusion that Genya would stay in her position, if given the chance. But if Genya is trying to say what Alina thinks she's saying, then Alina is hurt, and a little upset. Aleksander doesn't deserve to be lumped in with men like the king, and she's about ready to say as much when there's a knock at the door.

Ultimately Alina is glad that David the Fabrikator interrupts them, coming in and bringing her a pair of absolutely hideous gloves even as he says they're meant to enhance her performance.

Alina tries on one glove to be a good sport, though, and summons a light that splits into two beams for long enough to get a feel of what the glove is supposed to do. She thinks it maybe helps her focus her powers a bit, and while it's something that might have helped when she was first starting out it's far from necessary by now.

Just to be sure, she takes the glove off and summons the same light again. It splits just as easily, maybe even moreso, and she holds it for the same amount of time before moving the beams back into one and letting it dissipate.

“I think I’ll be alright on my own,” she says when she’s done. She doesn’t mean to embarrass David -- truly, the gloves are a work of master craftsmanship, even if his aesthetic choices leave something to be desired -- but he looks just about ready to crawl out of his own skin by the time he’s through the doors. Genya’s parting words, though, make her realize that his nerves are not because of her.

After teasing Genya and sneaking down to the outdoor festivities, there is still time before Alina must finish getting ready. Genya leaves, summoned by the queen yet again, and Alina decides to go see if Aleksander is still getting ready.

He is, of course, and when he shouts for Ivan the beginnings of a dirty plan form in her mind. She takes his kefta from the map table and into the only room that connects to the war room: his bedroom.

“You’re not Ivan,” he says when he sees her, but even then his mouth is creeping into a smile.

They flirt a little, as they are wont to do, and then Alina asks, “May I?”

“Thank you,” he says, and he turns to let her help him into the jacket.

“I hear you were able to focus and split light without the gloves,” he says casually, and his further explanation of the gloves assuages any lingering worries she has about them. He adjusts his coat and turns to her, stepping well into her space as he does so.

“I’m not nervous, though,” Alina says. She takes the front of his kefta gently in her hands, and tugs. He bends at her suggestion, smiling as he does so, and Alina lifts her head up to almost but not quite meet his lips.

The room is tense with his anticipation, but instead she merely whispers into his lips, “I know I can do anything while standing at your side.”

Then, she kisses him. She kisses him hard, and he pushes back with equal strength. One of his hands goes around to the back of her neck, minding her updo and settling on her nape. The other glides down her body, from her breast to her stomach to her hip, and settles there lightly.

Alina’s hands, meanwhile, slide from his lapels to his hips, where she gently pushes him back toward his bed. Aleksander understands what she wants immediately, and moves backward one step at a time until the bed hits the backs of his legs.

He pauses, and in that half moment between when he stops walking and before he sits down, Alina’s hands are on the front of his pants. Aleksander sucks in a sharp gasp as her fingers find the buttons at the front of his trousers and nimbly unbuttons them, one at a time. She saves his belt for last, until that, too, is hanging open from his waist.

Her hands still at his waist, she pushes gently, and that’s all it takes for him to fall lightly into the bed. He’s shorter than her, sitting down, and she grins in wicked satisfaction at the thought.

Then she drops to her knees, and says, “Whatever you do, don’t mess up my hair.”

She pulls his underwear aside, and Aleksander swears softly as she takes him into her mouth. She licks around the head before taking it in deeper, and wraps one hand around the base. She works her way up and down his length, swirling her tongue as she goes.

Aleksander exhales loudly above her, one hand wrapped around the base of her neck while the other holds him upright on the bed. His hand moves with her, squeezing her neck when she does something particularly sensational.

Alina pulls off with a pop, sucking hard on the release to make the sound. She looks up at him and they make brief eye contact. She winks at him and then goes back down, this time taking his length as deep as she can.

She paces herself, finds a sustainable rhythm that makes him mutter obscenities at just the right rate. She sticks with until Aleksander is breathless on the bed, and then she gradually speeds up. She knows he’s close: she can feel it in the way he grips her neck, the way his breath hitches, the way his hips buck, just a little. She’s got him exactly where she wants him.

In the other room, the main door opens and the sound echoes through the war room. One of the guards, judging by the sound of his boots, takes a few steps into the room before calling out, “Excuse me, General?”

Alina rocks back on her heels and looks up at Aleksander while she catches her breath. He’s breathing heavy, pupils blown wide as he watches her, slack-jawed in pleasure.

“One moment, soldier,” Aleksander calls out. He stands up and tucks himself back into his pants in one swift motion, closing each button with practiced hands. Alina stands, too, unsure of where to go. Aleksander smiles her with a finger on his lips in a gesture for silence, then strides into the other room with all the authority he can muster.

The soldier greets him, then speaks in low tones too quiet for Alina to make out. Aleksander answers him in kind.

It’s not long before Aleksander returns, with the sound of the outer door closing loud in the other room. He goes straight to her, and inclines his head so that his lips just brush the shell of her ear.

“Not many people surprise me, Miss Starkov,” Aleksander says, his voice rich and deep.

“I can’t wait to show you what else I have in store,” Alina replies, and she turns to kiss him once, catching his bottom lip between her teeth. He kisses her again and then pulls back, a dark look in his eyes.

“Next time, I will ensure we are not interrupted.”

His words send a shudder down her spine and a stirring between her legs. She’s been ready to get tonight’s demonstration over and done with all day, but now she has something much more enjoyable to look forward to after than just the dinner.

Chapter End Notes

Two-thirds of the way through! Last chapter will be posted tomorrow night.

Chapter 3

Thankfully, Genya was always going to be Alina's escort to the fete. She has a worried look on her face as she touches up Alina's makeup, though she doesn't say a word. The most difficult part is getting the heavily jeweled comb settled into her hair in such a way that it didn't pull the rest of her updo down with its weight, but Genya gets it settled in almost no time at all.

As they approach the ballrooms, Alina really does mean to follow Genya. She knows they're too early, but when she spies Aleksander looking stiff and bored in the other room, with the King, it's as if her feet are moving of their own accord.

The crowd parts for her: first because of the direct line of sight between her and Aleksander from the moment they lock eyes, and then once they see her kefta and realize what its color means. There really had been a plan, which Aleksander is keen to remind her of, but all she can think of is how alone he looked in that crowded room, and how she had to remedy that immediately.

The twin inferni whose names she still hasn't learned start their show, just a few throws of fire meant to gather attention in the room before the larger demonstration. It's exciting, though, seeing how much fun the two of them have showing off and playing catch.

When the twins are done, Aleksander whispers in her ear and his words prompt her down to their end of the ballroom. There, a dais has been raised to make them visible to as many of the visiting dignitaries as possible.

Alina is more than ready for this. She's proud of the work she's put into her sun summoning these last few months, the many hours she's spent honing the sunlight she calls to her hands and shaping it to her will. She knows that Aleksander has decades of experience on her, but she believes she'll be able to hold her own in this carefully choreographed display.

On the dais Aleksander turns his back to her and stands between her and the rest of the room. Silence has fallen, and his voice can easily be heard in the back of the room even though he doesn't raise it at all. With a clap his shadows consume the room, leaving just a scant few sconces lit along the walls. Leaving just enough light for all those in attendance to see what comes next.

Aleksander's words resonate inside Alina as even as his shadows settle and she steps into place. *You know who you are* , but also *you are not alone* and *you are perfect* , and *I shall be right by your side* and *you and I are going to change the world* .

The world is going to change starting right here, tonight.

Alina calls the light between her hands, a pulsing, nebulous brightness as strong as anything she's ever called. She shapes it into one ball and then calls forth a second, and with a flick of her wrist she throws them out over the crowd.

A display of this magnitude is exhilarating, and as she pulls her hands back together she looks to Aleksander, whose stare is nothing less than naked admiration. She smirks back in satisfaction, filled with pride.

Alina pushes one last time, letting the light erupt over the crowd into a brilliant wave of light that fades into nothing as Aleksander drops his shadows and returns the ballroom to its normal level of illumination. Alina's chest is heaving at the exertion and she smiles in the delight of a job well done.

Then the first dignitary drops to her knees, touching her head and her heart as she goes. Across the ballroom, men and women who bow to no one but the king kneel and touch their hearts. Alina still smiles, though alarm is beginning to creep in. She had prepared herself for awe, or applause, or even genuine disbelief after the light show. What she hadn't prepared herself for was... *worship* .

She glances at Aleksander as the grin begins to relax. He smiles back at her and nods, once and subtly, then mouths *perfection* .

The minutes following this are a blur. Aleksander approaches the stage and offers her a hand, then escorts her out of the room and to the pair of guards who will take her to one of the lower halls of the palace so that she may socialize away from the bulk of the guests.

"I'll find you after I talk to the King," he whispers into her ear, and she smiles as they part. She later would not be able to recount the position of the crowd around them -- were they still on their knees? Had they risen? -- nor would she be able to tell you anything that anyone else said or did. She is still ecstatic at her performance and his praise, and looking forward to his promise of later. She feels nothing but job as she makes her way down the back halls and staircases, until the Apparatus shatters the facade she had thrown up around herself and forces her to face reality.

The man has been nothing less than cryptic the few times she's met the man, and this is no exception.

Sankta Alina.

The words are like a cold bucket of water over her head, rolling over her in waves that she is powerless to stop.

Alina has never believed in the Saints. She's never put much thought to them before now, either. She doesn't know if they ever really existed, or if they were just extraordinarily kind or powerful people who did nice things while they were alive and then died just like everyone else, only to have their likenesses venerated.

Alina has never believed in Saints, but she believes in herself.

Genya leaves her in the care of Fedya and Nadia while she goes to meet Marie, the hand-off seamless. She gets cornered by one of the visiting dignitaries, and they leave to go grab drinks while she shakes his hand and listens to him gush about how impressive her powers are.

She doesn't recognize the two guards who then interrupt to escort her to dinner, but they've brought on so many extra for tonight's fete that she isn't surprised. She's honestly more relieved than anything else.

Aleksander appearing is a present surprise, as are the blue irises that he hands her. They smell divine, and she's so caught up in the flowers and the way their bodies walk as one after she takes his arm that it does not occur to ask him how he knows they're her favorite.

"I don't recall this being part of the schedule," Alina says lightly as they enter the war room. Aleksander closes the door behind him, the dull thunk of the lock turning echoing across the cavernous room.

"It isn't." Aleksander turns up the lamps, casting the room in a soft glow. "Perhaps you'd prefer to attend the dinner?"

Alina shrugs. "Marie can manage."

"By herself?"

"She has Genya."

"Ah."

Aleksander circles the table during their exchange, the pout of his pretend worry irresistibly sweet.

"Well, then, I suppose she'll probably be alright."

He steps closer, so close, and Alina is already lifting her chin to meet his lips when he adds, "Don't you think?"

Alina laughs despite herself, and they kiss.

Aleksander dives in to kiss her, and Alina sways at the force of it. She frames his face with her hands, desperate to touch him and be touched. He wraps her in his arms and lifts her onto the table -- and oh *fuck* -- and they kiss more deeply and passionately than ever before. Alina is still riding high from the demonstration, and the way Aleksander was looking at her every time she looked at him.

He pushes forward, and even through her frankly massive stack of skirts she can feel where he presses into her, his legs between hers. He kisses her back over the table so deeply she loses balance but then he catches her, his fingers splayed over her back. She is almost flat on the table but not quite, though any panic she might have had for her position is superseded by the feeling of his lips on her. He pulls back slightly but leaves her where she is, breaking the kiss.

"Are you sure?" Aleksander asks breathlessly.

Alina, still startled from their break, smiles and nods. He doesn't move, though, just stares at her, his hungry gaze expectant.

“Yes, *yes* ,” Alina says, realizing what he’s waiting on. She wants him now, wants him as much as she hated him the first day that they met. She wants him more surely than she’s wanted anything in her life.

He finally kisses her back with that same ferocious intensity as before, and they kiss like that, each unwilling to yield to the other. Then Aleksander pulls back and takes a deep breath, their noses almost touching, and tucks a stray hair behind Alina’s ear.

“Why don’t we move this to a more suitable setting?” He asks, his voice low and sultry, and Alina can’t agree quickly enough. He holds her hand as she jumps off the table and they make their way to his bedroom, stopping to kiss only a few times along the way.

###

Elsewhere in the palace, Ivan gets waylaid by Fedyor on his way to check in with Genya and Marie. The palace guards who secure Marie’s murderer in the dungeons search the fete for him so that he can relay the news to the general, but it’s over an hour before he is found.

###

In his bedroom, Aleksander shucks off his kefta and places it on the dress form in the corner.

“Here,” he says, and Alina turns her back to him so that he can help her out of the coat. Gently, reverently, he pulls it off her shoulders and places it over top of his own. She sighs when the weight of it is lifted off her shoulders.

He returns to her and places his hands on her shoulders, rubbing his thumbs in a gentle, circular pattern. Alina groans and slouches forward, the tension from the evening melting out of her like butter.

The next thing she knows is Aleksander’s lips at the nape of her neck, and he kisses around to the front of throat. Alina rotates her head as he moves, and laughs as his beard tickles the sensitive parts of her throat on the way up.

As she does so, the comb in her hair clinks softly. Alina reaches up to it and swears.

“I completely forgot about this,” she says, touching it lightly.

“Allow me,” Aleksander says, and he steps behind her again and reaches up to her hair. Alina doesn’t know what he does, but she feels his hands moving gently around the crown of her head, and then a moment later he hands her the elaborate jewelry.

“How did you...?”

Aleksander smiles. “Genya *might* have told me the trick for the release,” he says innocently.

“I’ll have to thank her for that later,” Alina says. She takes the comb and carefully rests them inside the pocket of her kefta, so that she can’t forget them later. “You, though, I can thank right now.”

She kisses him, and reaches up to cup his jaw in either hand. She runs one thumb across his beard, then skims her fingers down his neck and collar to the top button of his coat. While she works her way through the clasps, one by one, Aleksander reaches to her waist and begins to free her blouse from her skirt.

They finish at the same time, and Aleksander lifts the hem of Alina's shirt to reveal her white linen underthings. He then shrugs his coat off, and it falls into a puddle of fabric on the floor.

"I seem to be at a disadvantage," Alina teases, and Aleksander smiles fiendishly. He pulls his shirt off in one quick motion and then steps forward, his hands going to her naked waist.

"I'm always happy to even the playing field," he whispers, and then they're kissing again.

Aleksander, shirtless, is absolutely stunning. But even as Alina runs her hands down his abs and tucks her fingertips under the waistband, she wants more. This has been sweet, truly, but she is tired of waiting and wants to get a move on.

So Alina slides her hands to the front of Aleksander's pants and opens his belt, then makes quick work of the buttons so that she can drop his pants. A look of surprise flashes over Aleksander's face, and he says, "Well, if you're going to be like that," and a moment later he reaches behind her and her skirts are dropping to the floor. Alina steps backwards out of them, and Aleksander follows her.

"You're still wearing too many clothes," he murmurs in her ear. His hands trail from the back of her head to her neck to her chest as he kisses her, where he gladly frees her breasts and drops the linen that had been covering them into the pile of skirts. He cups her breasts in his hands and bends down to suck on one, his tongue trailing over Alina's nipple in a slow, torturous manner.

Alina lets out a long, quiet moan that builds with her frustration. One of her hands clenches in his hair, while the other skirts down his side to the waistline of his underwear. Then she reaches under and down and takes him into her hand.

At contact Aleksander's breath hitches, and for a moment Alina wonders if she did something wrong or moved too fast. Then Aleksander exhales a cool breath of air against her breast and redoubles his efforts with her nipple, and Alina starts to move her hand up and down his length. She's slow at first, but gradually adds speed as Aleksander's muffled sounds of pleasure tell her that she's doing exactly the right thing.

Then Aleksander pulls off her breast with a pop, and goes to kiss her. She gasps at the sudden cold air on her wet nipple, and Aleksander takes this as an opportunity to slide his tongue into her mouth. Alina moans, and their tongues collide. Alina doesn't even notice Aleksander's hand skimming down her stomach until his fingers reach between her thighs.

"Oh, Saints, please," Alina says, and Aleksander slides two fingers neatly inside of her, searching for just the right spot. Alina moans, louder this time, and pumps her hand harder and faster along his shaft.

Between her legs, Aleksander finds what he's looking for and rubs his fingers in a circle, gaining speed every so infuriatingly slowly. Alina breaks their kiss and pants into his shoulder, his fingers building shockwaves that reverberate through her body.

They speak at the same time: "Alina, I want--" "Yes, Aleksander, please --"

Realizing they want the same thing, they step awkwardly toward the bed until Alina hits it with the backs of her knees. Aleksander removes his hand from between her legs, pulls off her underwear, and lets it drop to the floor. With his hands on her hips he guides her to sit on the edge of the bed and then lay back.

Alina sees where he's going with this, and lifts her knees to her chest and lets them fall open from there. Aleksander, one hand wrapped around his shaft now, guides his tip to her opening. His other hand goes back between her folds and finds her clit, and Alina gasps when he makes contact.

"Tell me if this hurts you," Aleksander says as he looks her in the eye. Alina nods, still breathless, and with a single thrust of his hips he enters her and slides all the way in.

"Oh, Saints, you are perfect," Aleksander says, tentatively sliding back and forth inside her. Alina throws her head back at the fullness of it all, and Aleksander grabs her ankles to brace himself on. He speeds up gradually, moving faster and harder as he loses himself in the moment.

"Oh, Aleksander, yes, fuck, *yes* ," Alina pants, each syllable punctuated by a thrust.

Then he pulls out, and kneels down, and the next thing Alina knows is Aleksander's face between her legs and his beard on her inner thigh and his tongue, his tongue darting in to lick her.

"*Fuck* ." Alina arches her back up off the bed in pleasure, and Aleksander claps a hand onto her hip in an attempt to pin her down. Alina's hand darts down and threads her fingers through his hair, pulling him closer.

He licks her, laps at her most tender spot, draws circles with his tongue in the most maddeningly slow way possible. Alina is panting, making soft intonations every time his tongue changes directions. She is building up to something great, and is on the verge of being overwhelmed when his tongue retreats.

"What are you -- oh, fuck."

Aleksander stands and slides in, and she is so wet that there is no friction, no resistance to his entering her. He takes her hard, now, with little build-up, going straight to fucking her as hard as he can. At the same time he takes two fingers and slides them down to her clit, and takes up the same motion his tongue was making just moments before. It's different, but combined the two different motions are just enough to push her over the edge.

Alina comes with a loud moan that will echo in Aleksander's mind for a long time. Her pleasure is enough to push him over the edge, and he comes inside of her. He finishes with a

last few thrusts and pulls out. He takes a cloth from the bedside table to wipe himself off.

Alina is still breathless on his bed, but when he offers her the cloth she takes it and does what she can with the mess between her legs. She drops it on the table he took it from as she wiggles her way onto the bed properly.

Aleksander drops onto the bed beside her, his chest still heaving. Alina rolls onto her side and studies him for a moment, then cups his cheek with her hand; Aleksander leans into her touch with a hum and closes his eyes, wrapping one hand around her forearm.

His breathing slows over the next few minutes, and Alina thinks him almost asleep until he rolls over to face her and opens his eyes. His head is pillowed in one arm, but his other reaches up and tucks a stray hair behind Alina's ear. His fingers pause for a moment on her jaw, and then move down her body: down her neck and shoulder, skittering over her breast and torso until it comes to rest on the fullest part of her hip. His eyes travel with his hand down her body, his gaze not crude or cold but intimate, and possibly more so than what they had just finished doing.

"You mean a lot to me, Alina," Aleksander says softly.

"You mean a lot to me, too," Alina says back quietly.

"As much as I could happily spend the rest of the night with you here in my bed, though, the luxury of time is not on our side tonight," Aleksander says. He leans forward and kisses Alina once before sitting up.

Getting dressed again is not nearly fun as getting undressed was. As Alina struggles back into the layers of fabric that Genya had helped her into before, Aleksander fishes his shirt out from under the bed. When he stands up he pulls it on over his head, and watches her tuck the blouse back into her skirts.

"At the risk of sounding improper," Aleksander starts carefully. "Will you need anything to ensure that nothing inopportune occurs because of tonight?"

Alina gives him a funny look for a moment, and then realizes what he's asking.

"Oh, Saints, no," she laughs. "But that's sweet of you to ask. No, I've taken an herbal supplement every day since I joined the army, and Genya's had it brought to me every morning with breakfast since I got to the Little Palace."

"Every day since you joined the army?" Aleksander asks suggestively.

Alina swats at him as she goes to take her kefta off the stand. "It's more than just a contraceptive, you know."

Aleksander laughs. Alina looks at him and knows that she doesn't hate him anymore, and thinks that maybe it's starting to turn into something else entirely.

There's a knock at the door just as Aleksander is shrugging on his kefta, and while he goes to speak to whoever's there Alina makes herself visible on the far side of the table in the war

room. She puts her hands into the pockets of her kefta and touches the cold metal of the comb. She sighs, knowing she's never going to get it back into place by herself.

He speaks in low tones at the door and then shuts it, and comes back around to her at the table.

"Aleksander," she starts, but he quiets her with an urgent kiss, taking her face into both his hands and turning it up to meet his.

"I have to go, but I'll leave my guards outside until I return," he says.

"I'll be waiting," Alina says playfully.

When the door shuts behind him, Alina is left alone with her thoughts. Or so she thinks, until an entire section of wall opens into a doorway and Baghra steps out and tells her she needs to leave, and there's no time to wait.

"No!" Alina objects. Baghra pulls on her arm but she stands her ground.

"You need to leave this place," Baghra urges again. "It's not safe for you here."

"What's happened? Has someone snuck in?" Alina asks, trying to get a hand for the situation.

"I'm trying to save you, girl, and you need to come with me!"

Alina jerks her arm out of Baghra's grip. "I don't need saving," she says coldly. "I can take care of myself, and anything I can't handle Aleksander can."

Baghra studies her face for a moment, though Alina doesn't know what she thinks she's going to find there.

"You naive girl," she says finally. "I'm trying to save you from Aleksander."

"I don't need saving from him," Alina says. "He's training me to get stronger, so we can destroy the Fold together. Aleksander wouldn't do anything to hurt me."

"He's not trying to destroy the Fold," Baghra says. "He's the one that created it. He's the Black Heretic."

"You're lying."

Baghra says nothing, instead twisting a hand between them. The lights dim and shadows climb the walls, and Alina is confronted with an incredible, unbelievable truth: Baghra is a shadow summoner.

"And you're his mother?" Alina asks, though she doesn't know why she asked when the answer is surrounding them both.

"You must come with me," Baghra says, gently this time. "Let me get you out of the Little Palace and away from Aleksander. He intends to--"

“You don’t know what he intends to do,” Alina says harshly. “Even if I choose to believe you, the Fold was created hundreds of years ago. He could have -- he could regret it, want to make amends. You can’t know what he wants, now.”

“Don’t be foolish,” Baghra says, disdain returning to her voice. “He’s distracted you with dreams of a future with him. He has no intention of destroying the fold.”

“I don’t believe you,” Alina says. “And you should leave, now. I won’t tell Aleksander that you came tonight,” she adds, in a fit of generosity, “but you need to leave.”

“I’m not leaving without you, child,” Baghra says, though she takes a step back toward the hidden entrance through which she came. “You’ll be safe with me, if you come right now.”

“I’ll be safe right here, waiting for Aleksander to return,” Alina says evenly. “Now get out, or I’ll yell for the guards.”

“You stupid girl,” Baghra spits. “I’ll be waiting for you to come to your senses, whenever that may be.”

She steps back into the hidden passage, and closes the door behind her. Shut, Alina can’t tell where the outline of the door had been just moments before, and she wonders if Aleksander knows it’s there.

Aleksander. The Black Heretic, the shadow summoner, the one who had created the Fold. She doesn’t want to believe it, but Baghra’s shadow summoning hasn’t left her much choice in that.

She has slept with the Black Heretic.

But no, even as the thought runs through her mind, that doesn’t feel right. She has slept with Aleksander, who, several hundred years ago, had created the Fold. The Black Heretic is a myth, a legend, so much more than a single man could ever be.

And she knows Aleksander, as much as one could after only a few months. She knows his laugh, his smile, but also his frustrations and what keeps him up at night. She has seen him vulnerable: when he gave her his name, when she had gone down on him, when they had laid together, naked, just a few minutes ago. She knows Aleksander, and knows that he is not the same man as the Black Heretic, even if he once was.

It feels like Aleksander has been gone for a long time, though by the time he returns Alina has come to a decision. She will keep her word to Baghra and not tell him of her visit. Unnecessary as it was, she now has more information than she had before. As Aleksander opens the door to the war room with a murderous look on his face, Alina elects to say nothing. She will stay here with him tonight, be present with him and attentive and everything she has already planned on doing.

But she will also be careful. She will watch out, and heed Baghra’s words, and look for any misdeeds on Aleksander’s behalf. He’s smart but so is she, and he doesn’t know that she

knows who he used to be. This is something she'll keep in her back pocket until she needs it most, though whether she'll ultimately use it to help or hinder him she hasn't decided.

What she does know is that she cares for this man, this man that she hated so deeply the first day they met. She cares for him not just because she must, not just because of their shared life experience or the fact that they will one day be equals. No, she cares for him because every action he has ever taken in her presence has shown her that he cares for her, is willing to cherish her, even.

She hopes that will be enough.

End Notes

This is complete at 3 chapters. While there is a chance that I might make this a series at some future point, I have no plans for that right now (I would mostly need to think through some things as we diverge further from canon).

Comments and reviews are highly appreciated!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!